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THE INVASION PANIC IN ENGLAND

London, Nov. 25, 1859

Panics appear to have become in these latter days as regular incidents of English political life, as they long ago were of the English industrial system. Panics, if properly managed, form a great resource for governments in so-called free countries. When people are frightened out of their senses their minds are easily diverted from dangerous crotchets. Take, for instance, the Reform question in England. At the very time when England was considering whether she would resign forever the control of North America, Lord Grey proposed a sweeping Reform bill which was to do away with all the traditional influence of the Lords on the Lower House. In 1780 the Duke of Richmond brought in a Reform bill which positively went the length of demanding annual Parliaments and universal suffrage. Pitt, himself, whose centenary birthday has passed away without being noticed by his countrymen, then just occupied in celebrating the secular anniversary of Handel's death—this same Pitt had originally inscribed on his banners the words: "Parliamentary Reform."[412] How, then, came it to pass that the Reform movement of the eighteenth century, having seized the most intellectual representatives of the governing classes, even died away without leaving any traces behind? It was swept away by the French Revolution panic, in the train of which followed the Anti-Jacobin war, the Public Debt monster, and the ignominious Gagging Acts.[413] Some years ago, the Russian panic killed two Reform bills,[414] and now-a-days the French invasion panic is likely to do the same service. We can, therefore, estimate at their just value the dark apprehensions of the English Radicals, under Mr. Bright's leadership, who profess to consider the oligarchs and their organs in the public press as interested

panic-mongers, bent upon defeating Reform, and perpetuating misrule, by the specter of a French invasion.[a] There are, indeed, upon the face of the thing some ugly, suspicious-looking features. The Palmerstonian press is the main vehicle of the invasion panic, while Palmerston is apparently Louis Bonaparte's most intimate friend. The same man who was dismissed from one Cabinet because he acknowledged the *coup d'état*, without the sanction of his colleagues, and was driven from another Cabinet because he introduced the French Conspiracy bill,[415] would he be the most proper personage to cross Bonapartist schemes? At the same time that the Palmerstonian press warns the English people against Bonaparte's perfidy, it calls upon them to embark with the same man into a new Chinese expedition.

Nevertheless it cannot be denied that the present war panic in England, though it may turn to the profit of aristocratic party policy, is not altogether divested of rational grounds. Whenever Bonaparte concludes a new peace, England asks herself instinctively whether her turn for bearing the brunt of war has at last come. Thus a war between France and England appears a question of time only. For fear of the revolution, official Europe accepted the regimé of Louis Bonaparte, but a periodical renewal of war is one of the vital conditions of that regimé. It only delivers the Cabinets from the bugbear of revolution on the express understanding that they allow themselves to be successively conquered. He had hardly sat two years upon his usurped throne when the Russian war had become necessary to his prolonged tenure of power. Two years had not yet elapsed since the conclusion of the Russian peace when the Italian adventure alone could save him from an ignominious catastrophe. His difficulties have certainly not decreased by a succession of wars, resulting in nothing but delusions on the one hand, in public debts, and the growing insolence of a Pretorian guard on the other, not to speak of the opposition of the clergy, added to the other elements of internal insecurity already existing. After the Russian war, some time elapsed before Orleanist disaffection dared to mutter its sarcasms, and revolutionary despair to launch its grenades. The evidence of disappointment that characterized the last war shows most conspicuously in the dead lock of French commerce, the complete failure of the Imperial amnesty,[b] the recrudescence of severity against the press,

[a] *The Times*, No. 23473, November 25, 1859 (leading article).— *Ed.*

[b] Napoleon III's decree of August 16, 1859 on the amnesty of those condemned for criminal and political offences, *Le Moniteur universel*, Nos. 228 and 229, August 16 and 17, 1859.— *Ed.*

and the revived hopes of the Orleanists. While the mass of the French people grumble at a barren war that has cost them the savings of peace, the mass of the army rail at a peace that, in their judgment, has cheated them out of the fruits of war. Some months more will develop to their full extent the difficulties Louis Bonaparte labors under, and from which there is only one issue—that of a new war. The successive wars, however, which his position compels him to enter upon grow gradually more dangerous for himself and for Europe, as whose most powerful representative England may be regarded. The war in the Crimea was hardly carried on on European soil. The war in Italy could only be localized by its abrupt termination. A war on the Rhine, and still more an invasion of England, would in its very beginning, be tantamount to a general European war. But it is only between Prussia and England, as the respective objects of his next attack, that Louis Bonaparte has to choose. In both cases England will become a party, in the one as principal, in the other as subsidiary. The latter eventuality is the more probable, but it is impossible to foresee what direct collisions between France and England may grow out of a war between France and Prussia. On another occasion we propose reviewing the military preparations England is making with an eye to the impending conflict.

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